

September 24, 2019

VIA EMAIL: HOOVERC@KERNCOUNTY.COM

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Kern County
Planning and Natural Resources Department
2700 "M" Street, Suite 100
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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

SEP 24 2019

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Dear Ms. Hoover:

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR
THE PASTORIA SOLAR PROJECT, SCH# 2019090305

The Department of Conservation's (Department) Division of Land Resource Protection (Division) has reviewed the Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Pastoria Solar Project (Project). The Division monitors farmland conversion on a statewide basis and administers the Williamson Act and other agricultural land conservation programs. We offer the following comments and recommendations with respect to the proposed project's potential impacts on agricultural land and resources.

Project Description

The proposed project would develop a photovoltaic solar facility and associated infrastructure necessary to generate up to 115 megawatts of renewable electrical energy with the ability to store up to 40 MW/160 MWh of energy on approximately 650 acres of privately owned land in the southern portion of the San Joaquin Valley, in unincorporated Kern County.

Department Comments

The conversion of agricultural land represents a permanent reduction and significant impact to California's agricultural land resources. Under CEQA, a lead agency should not approve a project if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available that would lessen the significant effects of the project.¹ All mitigation measures that are potentially feasible should be included in the project's environmental review. A measure brought to the attention of the lead agency should not be left out unless it is infeasible based on its elements.

¹ Public Resources Code section 21002.

Agricultural conservation easements on land of at least equal quality and size can mitigate the project impacts in accordance with CEQA Guideline § 15370. The Department highlights agricultural conservation easements because of their acceptance and use by lead agencies as an appropriate mitigation measure under CEQA. Agricultural conservation easements are an available mitigation tool and should always be considered; however, any other feasible mitigation measures should also be considered.

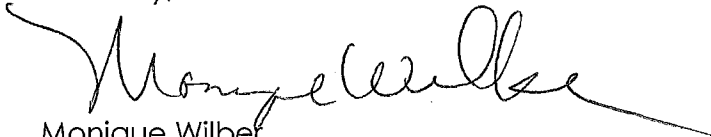
Conclusion

The Department recommends the following discussion under the Agricultural Resources section of the DEIR:

- Type, amount, and location of farmland conversion resulting directly and indirectly from implementation of the proposed project.
- Impacts on any current and future agricultural operations in the vicinity; e.g., land-use conflicts, increases in land values and taxes, loss of agricultural support infrastructure such as processing facilities, etc.
- Incremental impacts leading to cumulative impacts on agricultural land. This would include impacts from the proposed project, as well as impacts from past, current, and likely future projects.
- Proposed mitigation measure for all impacted agricultural lands within the proposed project area.
- Proposed contract resolutions and/or cancellation proceedings for land uses not compatible with land in an agricultural preserve and/or enrolled in a Williamson Act contract.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Pastoria Solar Project. Please provide this Department with notices of any future hearing dates as well as any staff reports pertaining to this project. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Farl Grundy, Environmental Planner at (916) 324-7347 or via email at Farl.Grundy@conservation.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Monique Wilber
Conservation Program Support Supervisor